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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000975

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: GERMAN OPPOSITION LEADER PROPOSES EU-TURKEY  
"PARTNERSHIP" DURING VISIT

REF: ANKARA 581

Classified by Polcouns John Kunstadter; reasons 1.5 b and d.

[11.](#) (U) Summary: German opposition CDU-CSU leaders told PM Erdogan and other GOT officials during a visit to Turkey that they favor a "privileged partnership" between the EU and Turkey over full Turkish membership. Erdogan rejected the idea, but maintained a positive tone during discussions. A German Embassy contact noted that EU Expansion Commissioner Verheugen, who is close to German PM Schroeder, also rejected the partnership concept. The contact said Schroeder will show strong support for Turkey's EU candidacy during his upcoming visit. End Summary.

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Three German Visits  
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[12.](#) (U) German CDU-CSU opposition leaders Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schauble met with PM Erdogan, MPs from the ruling AK Party, and others during a February 15-17 visit to Turkey. The visit from two of Germany's leading Turkey-sceptics came between a more positive January visit by German FM Fischer (reftel) and a pending February 22-24 trip by PM Schroeder, during which the PM is expected to show strong support for Turkey's EU candidacy.

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Merkel, Erdogan Stick to Guns  
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[13.](#) (C) Thomas Bagger, political and press counselor at the German Embassy in Ankara, told us February 18 that both the GOT and the German opposition leaders maintained their long-held positions on Turkey's EU candidacy during the visit, and both sides accomplished their political goals. Merkel made it clear that she favors a "privileged partnership" between the EU and Turkey over full Turkish membership. Erdogan made clear his view that such an option is "not on the agenda," and emphasized that Turkey expects its reform efforts to lead to full EU accession. However, both sides kept the tone of the meetings positive, and tried to emphasize areas of agreement wherever possible. Bagger said this was important for Erdogan, who has defined AK as a "conservative democratic" party and needs CDU support to develop ties with conservative parties in Europe. In addition, the GOT knows it will need CDU support at some point during its quest to join the EU. Merkel, for her part, wants to chart a middle course between hard-line CDU opponents of Turkish membership and the few CDU members who favor Turkey's EU accession.

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Both Sides Keep Tone Upbeat  
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[14.](#) (C) Bagger said Erdogan emphasized with Merkel and Schauble that Turkey is seeking only a negotiating date -- actual accession is years away and need not be discussed now. Bagger opined that this is a wise departure from the past GOT tendency of outlining a time frame for full EU accession. Merkel praised the GOT for passing extensive EU-related human rights reforms, and said she wants to encourage the reform process. Schauble, generally more critical of Turkey than Merkel, let Merkel take the lead during the visit, Bagger said.

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Merkel: Partnership Could Be Best Option  
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15. (U) During a joint press conference, a reporter asked Merkel what position CDU would take if the EU begins accession negotiations with Turkey in late 2004 or early 2005, and CDU subsequently enters the government. Merkel replied that CDU would support the negotiations, but she rejected the idea that the talks would automatically lead to full membership for Turkey. She averred that both sides should be open to the possibility that a "privileged partnership" will turn out to be the best option for all parties.

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Schroeder Will Show Strong Support  
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16. (C) Bagger said the German Government is preparing a much more positive visit by PM Schroeder. He noted that EU Enlargement Commissioner Verheugen, who is very close to Schroeder, told reporters February 17 that he rejected Merkel's call for a "privileged partnership." In addition, Schroeder and other German officials have recently said publicly that they expect the October EU Commission report on Turkey to be positive.

17. (U) MFA officials knowledgeable about the Merkel visit were not available due to the preparations for the pending Schroeder visit. We will therefore report septel on the MFA's views of the Merkel visit.

EDELMAN